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He who destroyes a good Booke, kills reason it selfe

an exhibition of books which have survived Fire, the Sword and the Censors

University of Kansas Library 1955

[Foreword] [Prelims] [England] [Germany] [Russia] [France] [Spain] [United States] [Various Countries] [Afterword]

UNITED STATES

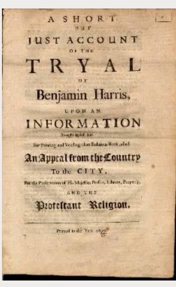
PERHAPS THE FIRST BOOK BURNED IN THE COLONIES

PYNCHON, WILLIAM. *The Meritorious Price of Our Redemption, Justification, Etc.... by William Pinchin, Gentleman, in New England.* London, 1650.* Pynchon was one of the first settlers of Roxbury; then, moving west, he helped to found Springfield. He returned to England in 1652 as a consequence of the present work, which, refuting the doctrine of atonement set out by the Westminster Assembly, was found so offensive by the General Court of Massachusetts that, October 15, 1650, they condemned it in these words: "The Courte, having had the sight of a booke lately printed under the name of William Pinchon in New England, Gent., doe judge meete, first, that a protest be drawen, fully and cleerely, to satisfy all men that this Courte is so farr from approoving the same as they doe utterly dislike it and detest it as erronjous and daingerous; secondly, that it be sufficjently answered by one of the reverend elders; thirdly, that the sajd William Pinchon, gent., be summoned to appeare before the next Generall Courte to answer for the same; ffowerthly, that the sajd booke now brought over be burnt by the executioner, or such other as the magistrates shall appointe, (the party being willing to doe it,) in the markett place in Boston, on the morrow immedjately after the lecture." The book was so burned the next day.

Only eight copies are known to exist, five in the U.S. The copy on exhibit was formerly in the great Brinley collection. On one of the front guard leaves it is signed:

Crescentius Matherus 1653
Cottonus Matherus 1673

Ever since the Brinley sale (Part 1, 1879, no. 644) this has been identified as the Mather copy. Careful inspection of the leaf, however, reveals the signatures are on a small irregular paper fragment which has been worked into the leaf. On the recto—the signed side—the fraud is barely perceptible, but it is quite obvious on the verso. This sophistication was first observed by Mr. William F. Shore of the University of Kansas Library. (Lent by the Connecticut Valley Historical Museum, Springfield, Mass.)

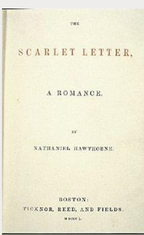

A SHORT
BUT
JUST ACCOUNT
OF THE
TRYAL
OF
Benjamin Harris,
UPON AN
INFORMATION
An Appeal from the Country
To the CITY,
AND THE
Protestant Religion.

HARRIS, BENJAMIN. *A Short but just Account of the Tryal of Benjamin Harris, upon an Information brought against him for Printing and Vending a late Seditious Book called An Appeal from the Country to the City....* London, 1679.* Newspapers in the U.S. owe a great deal to Harris. He was found guilty at this trial for allegedly printing a seditious book and remanded to Kings Bench prison. (He "earnestly beseeched his Lordship [the judge] that he might be sent to any other Prison, and named Newgate three or four times, but it was not granted him.") Upon release Harris removed to Boston, remaining eight years, and was so active that he is regarded as the founder of American journalism. On p. 4 Mr. Ollibear, a bookseller, testified: "My Lord, this Book was publickly sold in other Booksellers Shops before we had it and so we thought in a way of Trade, we might do the like; but as soon as ever we heard there was anything ill in the Book, we suppress the selling of it." The Bridgewater copy, from the great library founded by Sir Thomas Egerton. Although there are no signatures or bookplates, it can be identified as the Bridgewater copy by the number in the distinctive U shape at the upper right corner.

ZENGER, JOHN PETER. Even though many settlers in the U.S. in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had fled their former homes to escape political or religious restrictions, censors and book burners were not wanting in the colonies. As early as 1697 Gov. Bellomont had decreed: "You are to provide all necessary orders that no person keep any press for printing, nor that any book, pamphlet or other matter whatsoever be printed without your especial leave and consent first obtained." *The New York Weekley Journal* was begun by Zenger in 1733 and continued to his death in 1746. During a political quarrel between Gov. Cosby and his opponents, which involved a sitting of the grand jury, a committee appointed by the city council recommended that nos. 7, 47, 48 and 49 of the *Weekley* be burned by the common hangman, on the grounds of libelous statements against the government. On Nov. 17 Zenger was arrested and charged with seditious libel. The trial was marked by a remarkable performance by Zenger's attorney, Andrew Hamilton, who was then nearly eighty years old. The jury then withdrew and found Zenger NOT GUILTY, "upon which there were three huzzas in the hall." On display is Number 43. This verdict has been called "the greatest victory encompassed in America by the democratic spirit before the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the one that made all others possible."

THE BOOK OF MORMON, Palmyra, N.Y., 1830.* This is another book which has been suppressed, and even stolen for destruction. Books which become subject to differing interpretations by rival groups are prime candidates for suppression or destruction.

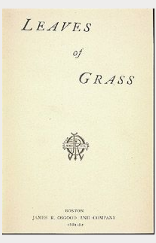
THE LIBERATOR. In 1831 a Georgia Senate resolution offered a reward of $5,000 for the apprehension and conviction in the state courts of the editor or publisher "of a certain paper called *The Liberator,"* because it was regarded as likely to cause unrest and trouble. *The Liberator* was edited and published by William Lloyd Garrison, the famous abolitionist.


THE
SCARLET LETTER,
A ROMANCE.
BY
NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE.
BOSTON:
TICKNOR, REED, AND FIELDS.
M DCCC L.

HAWTHORNE, NATHANIEL. *The Scarlet Letter, A Romance,* Boston, 1850,* was banned in Russia from 1852 to 1856. A U.S. clergyman objected to "toleration to a popular and gifted writer when he perpetrates bad morals—let this brokerage of lust be put down at the very beginning." In 1925 the censors working in Hollywood insisted that Hester be married on the screen.

BROWNING, ELIZABETH BARRETT. *Aurora Leigh*, 1857,* was condemned in Boston the same year as "the hysterical indecencies of an erotic mind."

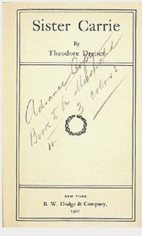
BEECHER, MRS. HENRY WARD. *From Dawn to Daylight: or, the Simple Story of a Western Home, By a Minister's Wife, New York,* 1859.* Mrs. Beecher's story, of the famous minister's early life and struggles is alleged to have been suppressed by the Rev. Beecher. He was later a party to the notorious Beecher-Tilton case. Ink facsimile title page in this copy.


LEAVES
of
GRASS
BOSTON
JAMES R. OSGOOD AND COMPANY
1881-82

WHITMAN, WALT. *Leaves of Grass,* Boston 1881.* When Osgood decided to publish the book they accepted Whitman's terms not to omit any part of the submitted copy. Under pressure from Attorney General Marston of Massachusetts, however, they asked Whitman to omit certain poems. He refused and they refused to publish "so as not be drawn into any suit." Whitman bought the plates. On display is the copy of the 1881 edition and a facsimile of a memorandum in Whitman's hand (courtesy of Mr. Charles E. Feinberg.)

CLEMENS, SAMUEL L. One of the most interesting but poorest recorded forms of censorship is wife-censorship. No doubt thousands of unknown books have been destroyed by reluctant hands of uxorious authors, but one of the recorded cases is the censorship of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* New York, 1885,* by Mrs. Clemens. She cut out the profanity and other strong passages. One plate was also cut out of the first edition. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,* 1876* was barred from the Concord, Mass., library in 1885 as "trash and suitable only for the slums." The plate of p. 441 of *Life on the Mississippi*, 1883, showing Twain in flames was omitted from later printings, also at the request of his wife.

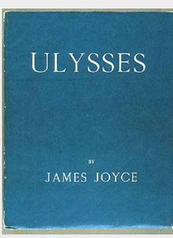
MERCER, A. S. *The Banditti of the Plains, or the Cattleman's Invasion of Wyoming in 1892—The Crowning Infamy of the Age,* San Francisco, Grabhorn Press, 1935. This account of the attempts of the cattle barons to preserve their property and interests, with its eyewitness accounts of murders, arson and pillage by lawless elements (on both sides) has been almost completely destroyed by "certain Wyoming people who years ago decided to wipe out, so far as possible, all copies of the book." Their descendants continue the process. Some of the few copies remaining are mutilated. The first edition, Cheyenne, 1894, has brought as much as $225.


Sister Carrie
By
Theodore Dreiser
Advance Copy
Book to be illustrated
in 3 colors
NEW YORK
B. W. Dodge & Company,
1907

DREISER, THEODORE. The history of *Sister Carrie,* 1907,* is a case of uxorious publishers. The first edition of 1900 was already in print when the wife of the publisher read it and refused to allow her husband to have anything to do with it, it is reported. Most of the copies were withdrawn and probably eventually remaindered. In 1907 another edition was published by a different publisher, without interference. The copy on exhibit consists of the sheets of the 1900 edition with a title page of the 1907 on a stub. Across the title page is written: "Advance Copy, Book to be illustrated in 3 colors." It is a presentation from Dreiser to Miss Galbraith Welch, Sept. 26, 1910. *The Genius* was suppressed in New York in 1916. After the sheets for *Tragic America,* [1931], were printed the publishers were advised deletions would have to be made to avoid legal complications. *The Genius* and *An American Tragedy* were burned in Germany, 1933, because they dealt with "low love affairs."

SANGER, MARGARET. Mrs. Sanger's books have been attacked several times. In 1915 *Family Limitation,* one of the important books to discuss publicly the problem of overpopulation and birth control, was found by a New York court to be "contrary not only to the law of the state, but to the law of God," and the author was jailed. The book was suppressed in London, 1923, and in 1929 Mrs. Sanger's clinic was raided on complaint of a New York chapter of the DAR, and her staff arrested; the case was dismissed when the medical profession defended her. *My Fight for Birth Control,* 1931,* has also been banned.

CABELL, JAMES BRANCH. *Jurgen, a Comedy of Justice,* New York, 1919,* was attacked by the sensitive New York Society for the Suppression of Vice in 1920 and the publishers were indicted. (The pictorial seal of the Society showed a book burning.) They pleaded not guilty and, two-and-a-half years later, the case came to trial. They were acquitted in three days. As a consequence of the charge of lewdness, however, the book gained a false reputation and was banned from many book shops and libraries. The trial briefs are interesting because they, as do other documents of the same kind, show how the courts try to distinguish between vulgar pornography printed for profit and frank (or imaginative) treatment of life. In the main this distinction is now honored.



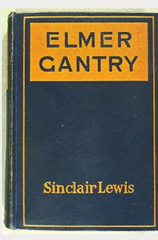
JOYCE, JAMES. *Ulysses,* London, Egoist Press, 1922.* (First English edition, printed in France). Twenty-three installments of *Ulysses* had already appeared in *The Little Review* (New York) before publication was stopped by action of the Society for the Suppression of Vice. Two numbers were seized by the Post Office. Although the precise facts are not clear, many copies of the present edition were seized and some were destroyed at the U.S. Post Office. In 1923 another 500 copies were printed "to replace those destroyed in transit to the U.S.A." and it has been stated that 499 were seized by the English authorities. However, three of these 500 are known to exist. In the early 1930s a copy sent to Random House, N.Y., was intercepted. The firm brought suit and the book was permitted entry in a famous decision by Judge Woolsey, who ruled that the intent of the work bars it from the class of pornography. The decision was upheld by the Court of Appeals and Random House printed the first American edition in 1934. Also on exhibit are the 1922 edition, the lawyer's brief on behalf of *Ulysses,* 1933, the decisions of Judge Woolsey and the Court of Appeals.

NEWSPAPER CENSORSHIP. The press in many countries, including the U.S., has often been charged with censoring the news by refusing to print some news or by slanting other news to suit the opinions of editors. Two books on display assemble material in support of such charges: Lambert A. Wilmer, *Our Press Gang,* Philadelphia, 1860; Upton Sinclair, *The Brass Check,* Pasadena, 1920. George Seldes, You *Can't Print That!* New York, 1929, on the other hand, is a report on the difficulties encountered by foreign correspondents in reporting foreign news because of official censorship.

MILMINE, GEORGINE. *The Life of Mary Baker G. Eddy and the History of Christian Science,* New York, 1909,* ghostwritten by Willa Cather. This is an example of a book which is suppressed by group action. Many copies have been destroyed when found; books like this are often stolen from libraries and destroyed. It is reported the plates were bought and destroyed by Christian Science representatives. (See Mercer, *Banditti of the Plains.*)

THE MOONEY-BILLINGS REPORT SUPPRESSED BY THE WICKERSHAM COMMISSION. N.Y. 1932.* On July 22, 1916, during a preparedness day parade in San Francisco, a bomb went off in the street killing nine and wounding forty others. Tom Mooney and Warren K. Billings were convicted of leaving the bomb in a suitcase, and received sentences of death and life imprisonment respectively. The trial was severely criticized, charges of withholding evidence were made against the prosecuting attorney, and, after intervention by President Wilson, Mooney's sentence was commuted to life even though appeals for a new trial were denied. For sixteen years after the trial there was much comment that the convictions were not just and the case engendered a great deal of political heat; Mooney had been prominent in the labor movement. In 1931 President Hoover authorized the Wickersham commission to study law enforcement. A subcommittee was formed under Judge Kenyon to study "lawlessness in law enforcement." This latter committee published its report, but suppressed the present part of it on the Mooney-Billings case. In 1932 the members of the committee other than Kenyon published their suppressed work as "The Mooney-Billings Report Suppressed by the Wickersham Commission." Mooney was pardoned some years later.

SCHNITZLER, ARTHUR. *Hands Around* [*Reigen*] *A cycle of ten dialogues.* New York, Privately printed for subscribers, 1920.* Despite the protestation that this translation of *Reigen* was authorized, it was pirated. The New York Court of Special Sessions convicted a bookseller in 1929 for selling it, and the conviction was upheld, more on account of the introduction, of which the author had no knowledge, than of the text itself. Appearance in a *Modern Library* edition soon after was uncontested. First published in 1900, Schnitzler's ring of lovers was produced in European theaters as early as 1903. Its recent film revival as *La Ronde* has made it once more familiar—and controversial. Schnitzler's works were among the first burned by the Nazis in 1933. Another book by Schnitzler, *Casanova's Homecoming,* first published in 1918, received treatment similar to *Reigen* in 1924, when Judge Wagner upheld its prohibition, stating that "we are essentially an idealistic and spiritual nation, and exact a higher standard than some others." The English version was withdrawn, the German selling unhindered. In 1930, Simon and Schuster obtained dismissal of a similar charge.

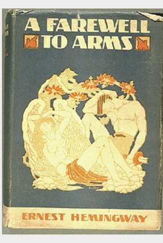


LEWIS, SINCLAIR, *Elmer Gantry*, 1927,* was banned in Boston on the grounds a religious hero was presented offensively. The publishers defended the suit, objecting to the wide discretionary powers exercised by local officials. It was also banned in Camden, New Jersey, Glasgow, Scotland, and other places. In 1931 the U. S. Post Office banned catalogs listing the book. His works are now banned in East Berlin.

SINCLAIR, UPTON, *Oil*, 1927,* was forbidden in Boston because of its remarks on the Harding administration. Sinclair addressed 2,000 people on Boston Common in his own defense. But the nine objectionable pages were blacked out with a fig leaf, the bookseller was fined $100 and trial is reported to have cost Sinclair $2,000.

LENIN, V. I. *The State and Revolution,* 1917, was seized as obscene in Boston in 1927. In 1940 a vigilante organization in Oklahoma City made an unofficial raid on a bookshop run by Robert Wood, state secretary of the Communist Party. Many books, including *The State and Revolution,* some fiction, the *Declaration of Independence* and the *Constitution of the United States* were seized and burned publicly. Eighteen people found in the shop (including a carpenter who was repairing some shelves) were held incommunicado, six as witnesses. Several were sentenced to ten years in prison and fined $5,000. However, in 1943 the Court of Appeals reversed the decision. The U. S. Post Office recently refused to deliver copies of *The State and Revolution* to the Brown University book shop until assured they would not be used for propaganda. The post office now refuses to deliver *Pravda* to individuals. The irony of that decision is manifest by the fact that several bookshops in New York City are authorized (registered as alien agents) to accept and deliver subscriptions to *Pravda* and other Russian publications.

REMARQUE, ERICH MARIA. *All Quiet on the Western Front.* Tr. from the German by A. W. Wheen. Boston, Little, Brown and company, 1929.* Despite the fact that it had already been expurgated at the suggestion of the Book-of-the-Month Club, this translation of *Im Westen nichts Neues* was banned in Boston, 1929, on grounds of obscenity. Copies were seized in Chicago. In the 1930s it was forbidden in the schools and military libraries of Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia. In forbidding this realism to soldiers, the Austrian Army showed impartiality by also forbidding the satire of Jaroslav Hasek's *Good Soldier Schweik.* Remarque's works were burnt by the Nazis.



HEMINGWAY, ERNEST. *A Farewell to Arms,* 1929,* was banned in Italy because of the account of the Italian retreat at Caporetto. Other works of his have been banned in the U.S. from time to time.

CALDWELL, ERSKINE. *God's Little Acre,* 1933, was brought to court by the New York Society for the Prevention of Vice and exonerated in one of the important decisions against censorship. Magistrate Greenspan said that a book must be judged as a whole, not in isolated parts. He insisted that the book was honest in intent and not "a work of pornography," that the occasional use of coarse language as part of sincere artistic intent was not censurable. However, in 1946 it was banned in St. Paul; whereupon the citizens bought it across the river in Minneapolis. It was banned in Boston, 1950. *God's Little Acre* may be the world's best selling novel, more than 6,500,000 copies of a recent edition already having been sold. *Tobacco Road* has also been banned in several cities, on the stage and in print.

ABELARD, PIERRE. *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise.* New York, 1933. Until 1930 the United States had a customs ban on importation of these letters. No stranger to suppression, Abelard was forced to burn his *Introductio ad Theologiam* in 1120.

STEINBECK, JOHN. *The Grapes of Wrath,* 1939. In St. Louis, three copies were ordered burned the year of publication because of a few words used; it was also banned in Kansas City and some places in Oklahoma.

WILSON, EDMUND. *Memoirs of Hecate County,* New York, 1946.* Shortly after publication 130 copies were confiscated by New York police on charge of being salacious, after 50,000 copies had been sold. The publisher was fined; the book has been banned and sellers tried in several states, the U.S. Supreme Court, in 1948, splitting 4-4 on a test of the New York Supreme Court Appellate Division's affirmation of the conviction.

VOORHEES, LT. COL. MELVIN B. *Korean Tales,* New York, 1952.* The author was court-martialed for failing to allow this work to be inspected by his military superiors before publication. The issue was whether a member of the armed forces has the right to publish something—which may or may not relate to his military duties, depending on interpretation—without submitting it to higher inspection first.

U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT. In June, 1953, several hundred books by more than forty authors were removed from U.S. Information Service Libraries abroad on order of the State Department. The N.Y. Times, June 22, 1953, reported that in Tokyo "'many' such books and periodicals were acknowledged to have been burned or scrapped for pulping." Most, however, were simply removed. They were removed because it was charged they were written by Communists or their agents; or contained Communist propaganda; or were written by men who followed the Communist line; or were by authors who claimed protection of the fifth amendment before Congressional committees; or "lent undue emphasis to Communist personalities and their statements." Some of the books, involved under one or more headings, were:

Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon.*
Howard Fast, *Citizen Tom Paine.*
Joseph Davies, *Mission to Moscow.*
Lillian Hellman, *The Children's Hour.*
Clarence Streit, *Union Now.*
Langston Hughes, *Fields of Wonder.*
Selected Work of Tom Paine, edited by Howard Fast.

ROBIN HOOD. November 13, 1953, the United Press reported from Indianapolis that a local resident requested that *Robin Hood* and Quaker material be eliminated from the schools because they tended to support Communism.

GRIFFIN, JOHN H. *The Devil Rides Outside.* Inspector Herbert Case of the Detroit Police Department is reported to have a long list of books which he considers objectionable. John H. Griffin's *The Devil Rides Outside,* a serious novel about a man's attempt to resist a worldly life and live a spiritual one, is on his list, together with 192 other objectionable and 46 partially objectionable. The book has earthy passages, but is hardly indecent or pornographic.

CONNELL, VIVIAN. *The Chinese Room** is typical of paper backs which some organizations are trying to run off the stands on grounds of obscenity. In 1953, in Middlesex county, N.J., the county attorney suggested to dealers that the book be withdrawn from sale. The Superior Court held, however, that the prosecutor "violated the constitutional guarantee of freedom of the press" and restored the book. The ruling was sustained by the New Jersey Supreme Court. In London last year Connell's *September in Quinze* was judged an obscene libel and the publishers were fined $4,200. Most English bannings are based on the famous Judge Cockburn decision of 1868, where he wrote: "I think the test of obscenity is this, whether the tendency of the matter charged as obscenity is to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences, and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall." In 1913 Judge Learned Hand of the U.S. District Court said in a decision that the Cockburn opinion "Does not seem to me to answer to the understanding and morality of the present time.... To put thought in leash to the average conscience of the time is perhaps tolerable, but to fetter it by the necessities of the lowest and least capable seems a fatal policy." The Cockburn decision has most recently been reversed in England also.

HUIE, WILLIAM B. *The Execution of Private Slovik,* 1954.* Sometimes one man tries to censor. The Detroit *Times* for April 9, 1954, reported that Councilman John E. Wojtylo of Hamtramck, Michigan, tried to persuade the city clerk to complain about this book. The councilman objected to Huie's calling Hamtramck, among other things, "[a place] where there are more cheap bars per linear foot than in any other city in the world." The author put Detroit in the same class, but apparently nobody in the latter city objected. The city clerk refused to take any action, saying, "It is just one man's opinion."

ARISTOPHANES. *Lysistrata.* The United States post office censors under several laws by which lewd, obscene and indecent material is banned from the mails, the words being given the vaguest definition. There are no official lists of such banned books available, each sender having to take a new risk on each title. Practice varies in time and place. Recently a copy of *Lysistrata* consigned to Mr. Harry Levinson, a Beverly Hills, Calif., book dealer, was intercepted by the post office, which declared it non-mailable on grounds of obscenity. Mr. Levinson, with the aid of the American Civil Liberties Union, sued for recovery on the grounds the statute involved was unconstitutional and an unlawful prior restraint on freedom of the press, following a lengthy correspondence with the post office. During the correspondence, copies of which are on display, the post office wrote to Mr. Levinson as follows: "[If you wish to] furnish a statement from a Library, University, Artist, Writer, Museum, or a private collector that they are interested in the purchase of this book, for its classic value, and you further furnish your assurance that the book will not be distributed to the general public, the matter will be given further consideration." Logicians may infer that there is not a single person in the U.S. Post Office who knows that *Lysistrata* is a work of classical importance. They may also infer the general public ought to be forbidden the book. Shortly after the plaintiff's brief was filed the post office returned the book to Mr. Levinson's attorney with no explanation. (Correspondence lent by Mr. Harry Levinson).

[Foreword] [Prelims] [England] [Germany] [Russia] [France] [Spain] [United States] [Various Countries] [Afterword]

Return to Kenneth Spencer Research Library

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